

# Commercial Fishermen and the National Fisheries Plan

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For years the U.S. seafood industry has been an orphaned cousin in rank of both public and political recognition. This has not been the fault of the industry, the public, or the politician. In spite of many fine industry organizations, we have nonetheless been splintered in needs and in purpose and in general recognition.

The farmer has created over the years a general recognition of his problems and the need for solution, regardless of his farm's location. The seafood industry and the sports fishing groups are only recently beginning to get the attention and recognition of problems and solutions necessary for reasonable viability.

The intrusion of foreign fishing effort, the increasing world need of protein, the fuel crunch, the publicity of the Law of the Sea Conference, and other news may have collectively helped to bring us to the notice of both public and politician. Regardless of how, we have arrived at a point of being heard and listened to; it is happening.

Regardless of being heard, we still have some serious obstacles. Many areas are bound by local, state, and federal regulations that do not hold true for the neighboring states. Some areas have periodic conflict between fishermen working different species. Other areas have problems of overfishing, conflict between large boats and small, divergent opinions about gear, and many others both too numerous to mention now and in some cases so local in character they are seemingly unimportant for national consideration. This last brings up a most important point, however. Fishermen, sport or commercial, are still fishermen and want recognition of their successes, problems, and needs for their locality.

Granted there are short-range current problems that are going to put some seafood operations and even some local sports fishing organizations out of business. *But* for the first time in my memory we have a chance to get a longer range look at our problems with some hope of real help.

Due to the forward looking dedicated aid from the National Marine Fisheries Service and a few farseeing legislators, we have a chance to have an input and to help to create a plan for the U.S. fisheries' future and perhaps its survival. If we goof this chance, we have no one to blame but ourselves.

Recognizing that there is still a large dose of suspicion by the fishermen that there will be unpalatable regulation, by the states that "Uncle" will usurp their prerogatives, by the federal offices that it is an unappreciated chore—it can still come into being! Only by input to the meetings needed to forge this plan can these suspicions be erased. Only by input can the plan be created. I hope enough of us are willing to do our part in both the listening and the input to get it done *now*.